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Streetscaping

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Planning and Development Department
Hamilton-Wentworth Region



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SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

Canadian cities have recently attempted to improve retail sales and pedestrian activity in decaying downtown areas by initiating streetscaping and beautification programs.

These programs arose out of an awareness for the need to modify downtown shopping areas into more competitive and attractive places. In many cities, downtown areas were deteriorating in both appearance and commercial viability as modern suburban shopping complexes became more attractive and competitive. Consequently, suburban malls gained larger percentages of retail sales in relation to the central area.

In order for downtown areas to become more competitive it is necessary to upgrade the downtown image and shopping environment, expand retail opportunities, direct mixed use development to the edges of the retail core and improve accessibility to and within the downtown core. These four planning and design goals were identified as key elements in planning for streetscaping and downtown revitalization programs.

Upgrading the downtown image and shopping environment as well as improving accessibility to and within the core can each be achieved by manipulating the physical design of the central area. The improvements include; enlarging sidewalks, better and more attractive lighting, tree plantings, hanging banners, placing street furniture, signage, creative paving and arranging for additional and more convenient parking.

Design themes are also often included in streetscaping plans. They are useful in developing a unified look to the downtown area and should reinforce the best aspects of the area which already exist.

For example, a city already possessing historical elements should retain and enhance these features when improving the central area. On the other hand, a newer or growing city can opt for a more contemporary and sophisticated theme. Whichever the case, the design theme should be reflective of the city's composition and personality and should lend cohesion to the central area.

Gateways are another feature of streetscaping. They are used to introduce the downtown area and are meant to alert the individual that he or she is entering a special area. Sufficient visual impacts, such as banners and signage, are used to mark entry points into the central area. As well, banners and signage often lend clarity to what is usually an overload of information and thereby gives a tidy and organized appearance to the downtown area.

Improving accessibility to the core can be achieved by improving existing roads and constructing new parking, improving safety and the appearance of transit and improving pedestrian connections within the core. It is considered that downtown areas have a locational advantage over suburban malls because central areas commonly are at the focal point of both social and economic activity and at the focal point of regional mass transit. Consequently, there is the potential for greater pedestrian traffic than at peripheral shopping centers.



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Once physical improvements are in place, it is necessary to develop effective management programs in order to ensure maintenance of the amenities and to improve security. Management organizations should be active in advertising and co-ordinating programs to animate the areas public spaces through on-the-street vending, outdoor cafes and open air concerts and events. It was suggested that if carefully timed, these events could be particularly valuable in increasing the use of the downtown area during off peak hours. It is expected that as the perception of the downtown as a safe enjoyable destination is portrayed then more people will visit and retail sales increase would be likely to occur.

The careful location of amenities is equally as important as the proposal to improve the downtown environment. For instance, the planting of trees so as they do not interfere with pedestrian flows, the placement of benches near curbs as opposed to store walls so as not to interfere with window shopping, the placement of festive banners, lights, signage to add colour, variety and identity. Also the location of outdoor cafe's and on-the-street vendors in areas which have lower pedestrian activity can increase pedestrian traffic and thereby benefit surrounding merchants. It was also suggested that street vendors and outdoor cafes allow for added vitality and security to pedestrians.

In summary, streetscaping is the physical alteration of a downtown area for the purpose of creating a pleasurable, safe and accessible shopping environment

SECTION II - FUNDING PROGRAMS

The Main Street program was first considered a way of providing seed money to cities to stimulate interest in planning streetscaping or revitalization programs. This program offered \$150,000 in loans to cities of 35,000 population or less. The money which normally went to the Business Improvement Association, was to aid in the beautification of main streets in smaller communities. As well, it was hoped that upon the initiation of streetscaping efforts public interest and private developments would result.

The Ontario Downtown Revitalization Program (ODRP) was similar to the Main Street program but geared for larger communities. Grants were offered to larger cities to aid in the beautification of main streets as well as in the construction of new structures downtown. It was hoped that the program would stimulate private investments and thereby continue the revitalization efforts.

The Central Area Improvement Program (CAIP) was accessible to any community and allowed for a variety of improvements. The conditions of eligibility were that downtown areas had to have 50% of the space occupied by commercial establishments and services. The money was intended to create anchor developments from which commercial activities could expand.

This program was also intended to attract new investment downtown and thereby create a chain reaction of improvements.

The varied success of these programs were assessed by the Research and Special Projects Branch of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in Toronto. The results of their evaluation is discussed in a later section of this report.

SECTION III

Many cities in Canada and in the U.S.A. have already or are in the process of implementing streetscaping measures in their core areas. Cities such as Guelph, Burlington, Ontario, Burlington, Vermont, Oakville and Sault St. Marie have each planned for improvements aimed at increasing pedestrian traffic and retail sales. Although relative success is anticipated, no one city has gathered statistical information as evidence. In other cases, the improvement efforts are too recent for meaningful data to be extracted.

GUELPH For example, the City of Guelph, revitalized one block of the central area in 1983. A street was closed and an enclosed mall constructed. In addition, streetscaping features were implemented. Abutting owners either sold their commercial space or entered into an agreement with the city to participate in the new developments.

A city planner, during a telephone conversation, stated that since March 1984, there appears to be a little more activity in the redeveloped area. Unlike in earlier attempts, once the majority of the revitalization and streetscaping was completed, businessmen were easily convinced to renew and repair the exterior of their establishments.

It is expected that more substantial results and a clearer evaluation of the revitalization and streetscaping efforts will be available in later years.

SAULT ST. MARIE The City of Sault St. Marie, in 1981, completed a Streetscaping program. This plan proposed that various pedestrian amenities be implemented in an effort to make the downtown area more attractive to the shopper and, therefore, more competitive with suburban shopping centers. Interlocking bricks, street furniture, bus shelters, tree plantings and other streetscaping attributes were all placed in the downtown area.

It was suggested that as a result, the number of commercial vacancies decreased drastically. In addition, it was claimed that the amount of revenue extracted from parking meters increased, indicating an escalation in pedestrian traffic.

Other indicators of commercial health are expected to provide additional information in future years.

BURLINGTON, ONTARIO The City of Burlington implemented a streetscaping plan in 1982. Similar to Sault St. Marie, pedestrian amenities such as tree planting and better lighting were erected.

It was claimed that thus far, most comments from merchants have been positive. As well, merchants have collectively invested \$20,000 a year towards extending downtown developments.

The extent of the benefits of streetscaping in Burlington have not yet been identified although it is expected that in later years a more meaningful evaluation will be available.

BURLINGTON, VERMONT The City of Burlington in the State of Vermont implemented a streetscaping program set apart from the downtown revitalization plan. The Planning Department for the City of Burlington was responsible for the construction of the Church Street Mall and office space while the Church Street Market Place Association managed the implementation of the streetscaping features.

Together they planned and arranged for the blocking of a total of four streets in the central area, three of which have been closed thus far. The intent of this traffic manipulation was to eliminate vehicle/pedestrian conflict and to create a people place environment.

The streetscaping measures included the installation of glass canopys over many store fronts, tree planting, street furniture and other pedestrian amenities. The Church Street Market Place Association, which was formed to manage the streetscaping program, indicated that the merchants outside the mall were very pleased with the downtown improvements. Generally, it was found that both retail sales and the amount of pedestrian traffic had notably increased. An attitude survey suggested that the image of the downtown area had been enhanced as many of those interviewed indicated that they now enjoyed shopping downtown.

The Church Street Market Place Association is also responsible for the promotion of the new downtown pedestrian area. It was mentioned that special events are scheduled and advertised in an effort to lure more people to the central area. For instance, the association is presently involved in promoting the unveiling of novel, animated, christmas window displays. It is expected that many people will attend this occasion.

In sum, the streetscaping efforts in Burlington Vermont, have been considered successful in improving the downtown image, increasing retail sales and achieving greater pedestrian activity.

OAKVILLE In Oakville, the Business Improvement Association recently introduced a streetscaping proposal which went to City Council on October 18th, 1984. The proposal, to be funded by C.A.I.P., is considered the first concentrated effort in improving the central area. If implemented, the Streetscaping Plan will not be suitable for evaluation for several years.

The City of Bellville and the Town of Perth each offer more significant streetscaping results. In each case, a more detailed evaluation and more accurate information is available.

PERTH In 1978, the Town of Perth implemented a streetscaping proposal which was funded by the Main Street program. The improvements included street furniture, new lighting, landscaping and other pedestrian amenities. Within the streetscaping proposal, Perth incorporated a historic design theme which was meant to reflect principal attributes of the town. In addition, simple improvement techniques such as attractive painting schemes were also contemplated and initiated.

Interestingly, the Business Association arranged for workshops and seminars to be presented to the area merchants. These workshops were intended to teach and advise local businessmen as to how to improve their businesses. Topics such as window displays, advertising and promotion were discussed. As well, monthly awards were given to those stores with the best window displays. These business instructions were meant to supplement the benefits of streetscaping.

Currently, a report is being prepared which will assess in detail the strengths and shortcomings of streetscaping in Perth. Thus far the reactions from merchants have been positive. It was also found that the amount of pedestrian traffic and tourist trade has also increased. In addition, upon the completion of the streetscaping measures, the degree of private investment also escalated.

Streetscaping shortcomings were also identified. It was mentioned that maintenance costs and management programs associated with streetscaping were more difficult to implement and costlier overall than expected. It was suggested that more money should have been spent on advertising and promotion in place of less significant streetscaping features.

In sum, streetscaping in Perth was successful in increasing pedestrian traffic and retail sales and is, therefore, considered a favourable and profitable proposition.

BELLEVILLE A streetscaping plan, proposed by Du Toit Consultants, was introduced and implemented in the City of Belleville. The streetscaping features included widening sidewalks, street furniture and other pedestrian amenities. In addition, building renovations and reconstruction were accomplished by private owners. It was claimed that previous to the improvement efforts Belleville's downtown area, which had largely been effected by the growth of suburban malls, was in a state of despair. Consequently, it was not difficult to enlist the aid of local businessmen in renovating the central area. Numerous vacancies and deteriorating maintenance motivated property owners to become active in overcoming the existing problems.

Upon completion of the Streetscaping Plan notable effects were identified. It was indicated that existing restaurants recorded nearly capacity crowds at meal times. As well, a variety of food outlets emerged offering a wide selection of food items and a suitable range of prices. As a result pedestrian flows increased as did retail sales.

Other positive consequences of streetscaping which were recognized was the change in public attitude towards the downtown. What had been considered dead and dirty was now perceived as pleasant and enjoyable. Higher maintenance costs were considered bearable and satisfactory in light of a successful downtown.

In summary, streetscaping allowed a deadening downtown in Belleville to become revitalized. By altering the physical design of the central core, the area became more attractive and competitive. The results were positive and beneficial to downtown patrons and merchants.

SECTION IV - Streetscaping and revitalization benefits in Windsor and Boston

Windsor and Boston each implemented both streetscaping and revitalization programs. It should be noted that although revitalization includes many streetscaping features it is qualitatively different. Revitalization takes into account the construction of structures and development downtown. For instance, new malls could be considered part of revitalization but could not be included in streetscaping plans.

WINDSOR The City of Windsor proposed a downtown revitalization plan which included streetscaping measures. The goal of this plan was to create a 'people' place environment downtown. Along with the implementation of most streetscaping features, a new shopping complex called Oulette Mall was constructed.

The first phase of the revitalization program, which was the mall, was to be completed by June 15, 1980 at a cost of \$317,610. Of this total, the Business Association contributed \$23,000.

Physical changes included reducing traffic to two lanes and widening sidewalks from 3.6 meters to as much as 8 meters. As well, thirty-four trees, 5 meters high, were also planted. Street furniture and planters were also placed throughout the mall. Existing overhead wiring and lighting were removed and 28 incandescent lighting stands with globe style bulbs were erected. Finally, earth coloured interlocking bricks were laid to add a rustic atmosphere.

Shortly after completion, Phase I was regarded a success as merchants announced an increase in pedestrian traffic and retail sales. Consequently soon after, the Downtown Action Task Force recommended that the remainder of the project be completed before the originally anticipated completion in 1983.

Thus on November 21, 1980 Phase II was completed. It consisted of adding and extending streetscaping features particularly outside the mall. For example, several circular benches, planters and waste recepticals were installed.

Phase III was completed by 1983. Some additional streetscaping features were implanted in the core although the main intention of this phase was to beautify surrounding areas of the downtown. For example, pedestrian improvements such as improved lighting were installed for the purpose of rendering parking areas more convenient and safer.

In its finished state, downtown merchants were pleased with the overall appearance of the downtown area. It was indicated that upon completion of the first phase, merchants became anxious to see the completion of the last two phases and, consequently, volunteered contributions towards that goal. Previously, merchants had refused to contribute to the revitalization plan.

Other positive outcomes of the plan included the vast improvement of night life in downtown Windsor. It was said that teenages and university students were flooding back to the downtown for the purpose of parading fast cars and trying out new bars. Consequently, entertainment expanded and accelerated while outdoor cafe's emerged along sidewalks. During evenings, the downtown acquired a leisurely and enjoyable atmosphere.

The Business Improvement Association conducted a brief evaluation of the effects of the downtown improvements. Once statistics indicated that 15% of the businesses located in the downtown core in 1983 were new. It was believed that 12% of those businesses were relocations from other parts of the city. Overall, the amount of commercial change was considered significant. Few new commercial enterprises downtown were recorded going out of business.

Newspaper articles provided by the City of Windsor stated that Windsor's downtown, which was given up for dead a few years ago, had been regenerated in a splendid fashion. The success of the downtown was based on four main reasons:

1. Restaurants	-	a core of quality and accessibility
2. Outdoor Cafe's	-	centerpiece of a new leisurely ambience associated with downtown
3. The Mall	-	a terrific new look
4. The Stores	-	improving facades.

These attributes were said to have bred commercial optimism and increased the economic potential of the central area.

In summary, Windsor's revitalization and streetscaping efforts have been considered and labelled a great success in increasing retail sales and pedestrian activity downtown.

It should be noted that streetscaping benefits could not be separated from revitalization features. As a result, the exact impact of streetscaping in Windsor cannot be isolated or accurately measured.

BOSTON The City of Boston also proposed a downtown revitalization scheme. The plan which was called Downtown Crossings, was completed in 1979. It featured an auto-restricted pedestrian mall which included, brick pavement, historic era lights, benches and a pedestrian arcade. The goal of the plan was to rejuvenate the downtown area in terms of commercial activity and pedestrian activity and to minimize pedestrian/vehicle conflict.

A detailed evaluation conducted between 1978 and 1980 confirmed that the auto-restricted area benefitted both pedestrians and motorists. It was noted that retail sales had increased by 12% in just one year. Daily pedestrian volumes in the central area were noted to have increased by 113%. In addition, carbon monoxide levels in the immediate area were recorded to have decreased by 67%. A less significant decrease in the level of carbon monoxide was reported in adjacent areas. As well, noise levels were noted to have decreased considerably. Overall, area wide traffic volumes were found to have decreased by 5%. In addition, retail sales increased not only in the central area but also along side streets leading to the downtown core. The flow of goods and deliveries were noted to have ameliorated as traffic congestion relaxed. A marked 17% increase in the lunch hour pedestrian traffic was recorded signifying the return of local office workers.

Optimistic statistics projected that the effects of the revitalization plan would cause an 18% increase in the number of downtown employees, an 80% increase in retail sales by 1990 and an overall commercial growth of 60%.

Apart from statistical evidence, general observations were presented. It was claimed that there was in fact a significant growth in the number of downtown employees. Naturally, as business activity accelerates the need for additional staff arises. In addition, it was reported that there was indeed an influx of tourist and business investment dollars. Logically, as an area becomes more attractive and commercially profitable, the greater the investment interests. Finally, significant demographic changes were also observed. Generally, as the desirability of the central area is increased by downtown improvements the demand for land in the central core is heightened. As a result, land values rise causing increases in housing rents that force lower income tenants to relocate further away from the core. These lower income tenants are replaced by higher income groups which, in turn, cause retail sales to increase through added resident spending.

Each of these observations were offered in support of the 60% commercial growth prediction. Each case was researched and documented through the use of qualitative and quantitative models.

A research survey of consumer attitudes was conducted in 1,500 households. The survey was more precisely a thorough market research study of demographic attitudes and shopping behaviours of the downtown prime trade area population. The survey, which was undertaken as part of the total evaluation, included demographic and psychographic research techniques designed to facilitate market segmentation and identification of the attitudes of separate market groups. The objective was to identify those attributes of downtown shopping that each group perceived as needing improvement.

Four categories were tested; retail character (i.e. variety, quality), security characteristics, quality of the walk environment and, parking and accessibility. The results were as follows: high income groups rated the downtown well on parking, stores and personal safety but expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the walk environment. Lower income groups rated parking, safety and the quality of the walk environment as satisfactory but were dissatisfied with the price and variety offered to them by downtown stores.

A secondary attitude survey which was conducted sometime after the improvements were completed, yielded the following results: of those central areas users who were surveyed, 25% said they liked the amenities and the new pedestrian areas, 21% said they didn't like the crowded condition of the area, 16% were dissatisfied with their perceived personal safety and 12% mentioned parking problems.

The central area users were also asked to rank the following four attributes in order of importance; alteration and expansion of retail mix, upgrading the walk environment, upgrading safety conditions and improvements for parking and access. The following results were submitted. The attribute identified as being the most important force in attracting central area patrons was the alteration and expansion of the retail mix. It was suggested that the addition of high order stores was crucial in attracting additional shoppers.

It is believed that by expanding the retail mix, a larger more diverse consumer population is likely to result. The second most important attribute in attracting central area shoppers was upgrading the quality of the walk environment. This strategy is considered a subtle psychological manipulation in attracting a larger market.

Improvements in terms of cleanliness and personal safety was considered the third most important effective feature. This indicates that patrons are aware of the safety problems associated with a more open style shopping area classically found in downtown areas. In comparison, suburban shopping complexes are considered safer areas to shop because they are enclosed, contain continuous store frontages and offer close, convenient and illuminated parking. Further research into the subject of pedestrian safety indicated that a carefully managed program of both maintenance and security would increase retail sales by 6%.

Finally, improvements to parking and accessibility was considered the least important strategy in attracting added patrons. The availability of parking was not perceived to be a critical decision in deciding whether or not to shop downtown. However, a 3% increase in sales was forecast in response to the upgrading of the safety and convenience of parking areas. The people surveyed also expressed a need for more reasonably priced parking.

Upon the collection of demographic and consumer attitude results, the estimation of retail sales was possible. These estimations were calculated mathematically, using a market research method called the Gravity Model.

In summary, streetscaping and revitalization efforts in downtown Boston have created what is considered a very successful pedestrian zone. Altered areas became popular, busy and alive public spaces. Small scale improvements such as pedestrian amenities, banners and signage have all contributed notably to the reforming of public attitudes and perceived images of the downtown area. Overall, the public benefited directly from increased cleanliness, safety, opportunity for small business ventures and job creation.

In sum, although it is very difficult to separate streetscaping impacts from revitalization efforts, it was suspected that streetscaping features play a major role in rejuvenating central areas.

SECTION V - Economic, Social and Physical Effects

Recently, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Research and Special Projects Branch investigated the effects of streetscaping and revitalization in cities in Ontario which had received funding to undertake such projects.

The study examined economic, social and physical conditions as they might have been affected by streetscaping and revitalization efforts. The research was conducted through interviews and questionnaires.

To begin, economic facts and figures proved to be the most accurate and easiest to determine. It was found that, generally, cities which had implemented a streetscaping program, had experienced a decrease in the central area vacancy rates. In addition, it was reported that property values inflated in response to an increase in the demand for downtown commercial space. Consequently, political justification for spending public money on "pretty" streetscaping measures swelled as municipal revenues thrived. It was suggested that in the longrun, streetscaping measures pay for themselves because as land values increase, property taxes increase also resulting in higher municipal revenues. Real estate agents, who were quoted by researchers, stated that property values in altered downtown areas did in fact increase and that streetscaping features were accountable at least in part for the increase. Also it was suggested that property owners were much more likely to re-invest in their properties after the improvements were completed.

Other effects of streetscaping included the escalation of retail sales. In some cases, businessmen claimed that the new pedestrian amenities were responsible for a 20% increase in sales. It should be noted, however, that it is difficult to isolate all factors contributing to an increase in sales. Therefore, caution is advised when considering such percentages; at best, they are a rough estimation.

In the long-term, additional economic benefits are expected to result from increased investments in the central area. It is thought that by and large, increased investments which already occurred in many downtown areas were as a result of streetscaping measures. In particular, small scale improvements to private businesses constituted an essential portion of the noted increase in investments. Generally, these improvement efforts followed the initial placement of streetscaping features.

Of all the economic indicators, employment figures are considered the most politically significant. It was suggested that, both indirectly and directly, streetscaping measures create temporary and permanent employment. Temporary jobs exist during the construction and placement of pedestrian amenities. Permanent employment comes in two forms. Some jobs are created to allow for the continued maintenance of the newly improved area. More indirectly, jobs result from the added need for additional staff. As well, in most cases, new businesses require the hiring of permanent staff.

It should be noted, however, that there is a considerable difference in the extent of job creation associated with revitalization. Such projects commonly propose new shopping and office complexes which require significantly more temporary construction workers and permanent commercial staff. Streetscaping, by comparison, creates employment on a much smaller scale.

Another important benefit of streetscaping is the effect on local business organizations. It was determined that, previous to streetscaping programs, most areas possessed a rather inactive business association. Often little or no effort was exerted in attaining a satisfactory combination of retail establishments. However, it was revealed that streetscaping frequently sparked renewed interest within the organization. As a result, greater care was exercised in achieving favourable state of retail mix.

Social conditions were also found to have been affected by streetscaping and revitalization programs.

To begin, it was suggested that streetscaping indirectly provided community identity from which greater social interaction and community spirit could evolve. Features such as outdoor cafe's, outdoor concerts and public events were considered perhaps just the beginning of lasting central area uses.

An effect, it was found the streetscaping allowed for a new leisurely lifestyle characterized by outdoor cafe's and public space. This shift in the perception of the downtown is thought to promote the potential for social interaction. The social emphasis, therefore, is to create a 'people place' image of the downtown.

An important aspect of streetscaping and revitalization that should not be ignored is the effect on the demographic composition of the area.

Necessarily, as land values and rents increase, the ability of existing tenants to pay rent decreases. As a result, displacement may and has occurred in some central areas. These lower income tenants were often replaced by young educated professionals who sought to live among the 'excitement' of downtown. Consequently, the downtown area becomes a more expensive place to shop and live. Although reliable information was not available, it was believed that provisions were made for relocation or rent assistance.

Streetscaping necessarily demands physical alterations in order to make the downtown attractive, convenient and accessible. In some cases, vehicle traffic was either rerouted or restricted in attempts to make the downtown 'people oriented' instead of traffic congested.

The visual impact of the downtown is also important. For this reason, some cities chose to comply with a design theme. For example, Perth maintained and enhanced an existing historic design theme.

Finally, downtown beautification in the form of tree plantings, street furniture and other pedestrian amenities have proven to be aesthetically pleasing. Public opinion indicated that the downtown areas became cleaner and tidier. The general consensus was that the downtown area 'looked better' and, consequently, the area became more inviting.

In sum, the study conducted by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing indicated that streetscaping and revitalization efforts had many benefits and positive effects. In particular, economic benefits were the most factually revealing. However, social and physical effects were also identified. Generally, the study found that streetscaping was a positive and successful measure towards increasing retail sales and pedestrian activity.

SECTION VI - Conclusion

In light of this study's finding, streetscaping does in fact offer numerous benefits and advantages. All areas contacted revealed that retail sales and especially pedestrian activity had been increased.

Consequently, streetscaping would be expected to be successful in attracting central area shoppers. It has been indicated that lavish redevelopment is not necessary to lure shoppers to intended areas. Understandably, revitalization and development would be a greater force in attracting consumers.

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